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THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

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For paragraphs under the word "Ans." the editor is personally responsible.

December, 1891.

QUESTION CLVII.

Is it true, according to Mr. Moncure D. Conway's statement in October "Arena", that "the Theosophists receded from a proposal to test all the charges against Madame Blavatsky, including the handwriting of the Coulomb letters, before a Court of Law"? It is well known that the T. S. did not then or since court a full and free investigation of the facts. Why has this policy been pursued? What is meant by the allusions in Mrs. Besant's "Time" article of March to Mr. R. Hodgson's having been "befooled to the top of his bent" by the Hindoos; and again, to the "ingenious plot of which Mr. Hodgson was the willing victim"? How did the Hindoos fool him, and what was their plot?—D. L.

Ans.—The FORUM's small space obviously precludes full reply. But the clue to the whole case is this,—the intensely reverential feeling of Hindûs to all pertaining to Masters and Occultism, and their habitual reserve and secrecy concerning both. When Madame Blavatsky gave unmistakeable proofs of her relation to and mission from Masters, she received their honor

and confidence, these being extended to her trusted associates, although the publicity given to doctrines and phenomena was distasteful to the Hindû mind. When Madame Coulomb, confederating with the missionaries (see *Talking Image of Urur*), uttered her slanders and forgeries, Madame Blavatsky's instant impulse was to legal proceedings. A Committee of the leading Theosophists in India carefully considered the question, and their unanimous judgment was against that step. Their reasons were that the prepossessions of the English local Judges against every form of Occultism ensured the hostility of the Court in advance; that the character of Occult phenomena made a Civil Court an unfit agent for investigation; that the sympathy of the Court with its countrymen, the missionaries, as opposed to Madame Blavatsky, a Russian, would make a fair hearing impossible; that testimony from Hindûs extorted by subpœnas would be odious to the Hindû character; and—most of all—that the certainty of irreverent ridicule and the bantering by scornful lawyers upon all that was most sacred and tender to native and other Theosophists would be inexpressibly painful to native sentiment, wound earnest members everywhere, and be of untold injury to the Cause itself. These considerations were so potent that the Committee advised any amount of misjudgment by citizens rather than misjudgment by a Court. Nevertheless, so outraged was Madame Blavatsky by the slanders, and so determined upon public redress, that she insisted on appealing to the law. It was only after urgent and repeated protestation by her nearest friends, and *upon Col. Olcott's assurance that he would resign the Presidency if she persisted*, that she finally and unwillingly gave up her intention. (See *Theosophist* for July, 1891.)

How can it be said that the T. S. "did not then or since court a full and free investigation of the facts"? When Mr. Hodgson, sent out by the S. P. R. to investigate, reached Adyar, he was invited to stay at Headquarters, the whole establishment was thrown open to him, and he was given every facility for examining witnesses, Col. Olcott insisting on the utmost freedom. In fact, the complaint by Madame Blavatsky was ("Protest" in *Occult World Phenomena*) that the investiga-

tion was *not* "full and free", for she was not allowed to see the spurious letters upon which the S. P. R. was giving judgment! Dr. Hartmann and others made thorough investigation of the building and the witnesses, and *Nine Months at Headquarters* and other pamphlets contain the testimony and affidavits. Where is the evidence that any unwillingness anywhere existed for the amplest scrutiny, or that the objection to legal proceedings was any other than has been described?

Mr. Richard Hodgson was a young man, not skilled in cautious investigation, and wholly unacquainted with the East and with the peculiarities of Hindûs. As soon as the natives sensed his quality and methods, their national repugnance to English handling of their most sacred topics was aroused, and they began to cover them up from his touch, leading him off from the regions they considered him to profane. We Westerns do not comprehend either their sensitiveness or their policy, but those who have learned the national character assert it as a fact, and we cannot expect that character to manifest itself in ways opposite to its nature. Hence Mr. Hodgson encountered just the reserve or misguidance which that character would dictate, but which he, accustomed to contrary national types and wholly ignorant of this, in no way understood. He was completely bamboozled, "befooled" as Mrs. Besant puts it. The "plot", we suppose, was to make him think that there was nothing in the stories of Mahâtmas and Occult powers, and to get him out of areas he did not respect but which Hindûs revered, but we cannot say *what* plot Mrs. Besant referred to, not having her meaning at hand.

To be merely a "victim" to wiles in a strange land would not of itself be discreditable to an inexperienced youth, but it is hardly possible to regard Mr. Hodgson as only weak or green or credulous. The matter of the measurement of the premises, as exposed by Mr. Judge in the *Path* for Aug., 1886, and by Mrs. Besant in *Time*, is of itself enough to give a graver color to the estimate one must form of him, and to justify the adjective "willing". This and other cases are discussed in that article.

Mr. Hodgson's great work has been so hopelessly riddled

that it is needless to repeat that process. Mr. Sinnett and Mrs. Besant make no pretense of concealing their contempt for him and his outfit as investigator and his methods, and her "poor Mr. Hodgson" embodies the sneer which the "Report" seems so generally to have evoked. The fact that two of the most eminent Theosophists in the world were first drawn to Theosophy by disgust at its assailant as self-portrayed in the "Report" is one evidence of how sadly the poor man "gave himself away". The Hindûs certainly made a fool of him, but—what was very much worse—they led him to make a fool of himself! It is hardly to be expected that Theosophists should feel deep-seated commiseration over the spectacle, or even that they should contemplate without satisfaction his somewhat—shall we say infelicitous?—exploitation of a new hemisphere later. That Karma should overtake any one who is unfair and slanderous is not matter for regret; when the slandered is an unselfish philanthrophist who sacrificed ease, luxury, rest, health, and even life for others' benefit, it may be matter even for complacency.

QUESTION CLVIII.

Much is said by writers on Theosophical subjects against the dogma of vicarious atonement as taught in some of the Christian churches. Erroneous dogmas are often the exaggeration or perversion of truth: is that the case here? If so, what is the true teaching that underlies this dogma?

Ans.—That all conspicuous religious dogmas have a root in some truth is a fact, and a fact full of suggestiveness and hope. "The soul of truth in error" has implications of assurance as to human destiny which are among the most cheering attainable. It means that falsehood was not intentionally devised, that the very intensity of conviction as to righteousness was what produced a one-sided creed, that the same intensity gives promise of the ultimate triumph of good.

The doctrine of "vicarious atonement", unphilosophic, irrational, preposterous as it is, revolting to reason, sentiment, moral instinct, one of the most artificial and clumsy mechanisms ever invented in the name of religion, has yet back of it

and under it two of the soundest and grandest of all religious conceptions,—the Inflexibility of Law, and the Divinity of Forgivingness. All reverent thought towards the Supreme Being forbade that therein should be found any place for vacillation or uncertainty; and, indeed, every estimate of Moral Law required that it should be unflinchingly sustained, as permanent and unchanged as the facts whereon it bore and the interests it expressed. The highest dictates of the soul demanded that in the vindication of Right there should be no paltering or weakness, no compromise with sin, sin which was so vile and so pestiferous in the universe of God. But, on the other hand, justice and tenderness and pity and right sentiment united in perception that an administration merely hard, chilling, inaccessible to feelings of mercy or compassion, must be entirely one-sided, really inferior in fine moral quality to the very creatures it supervised. If sincere penitence received honor and sympathy from men, and if it extinguished the desire for punishment, could it be less welcomed by the Infinite Mind and Heart? How could the latter be more merciless than its own offspring?

Here were two antagonistic, contradictory ideas, yet each imperative, each absolutely required by both sentiment and logic. There must be some way to harmonize, if not to reconcile, them. And so the ecclesiastical intellect constructed an ingenious scheme by which the Law was to be unflinchingly maintained and its utmost forfeit exacted, and yet forgiveness and immunity made possible to everyone who desired them. It did this by treating punishment as a debt. Now a debt may be paid in kind, or by an equivalent, or by another than the debtor. An infinite debt can only be paid by an infinite payer—God, and yet the suffering can only be undergone by a finite being—man. By combining the two in one person, and by attributing to the suffering of the man the infinite value consequent on his union with God, Theology paid the full debt of the Law and thus opened the way to entire forgiveness of such sinners as accepted their own release though faith.

Plausible as this contrivance seemed to the schoolmen, it is vitiated by countless objections from reason and reverence.

Its basic principle is unsound, for punishment is not a debt,—an exterior liability unrelated to character, but a personal infliction intended (as one object) for the very purpose of renovating character. Even if a debt, it could not be thus discharged. For infinite fulness could only attach from infinite suffering, *i. e.* the suffering of the infinite part of the composite being, but God cannot suffer. To admit that God cannot suffer and yet to claim for the suffering a value only possible if God did suffer, is a contradiction; it is to "eat your cake and have it too". But even if this were not so, and if the scheme were admissible, it would disorganize morals because effecting too much. If Christ bore the punishment for all, nobody else could justly be punished, since that would be to exact two punishments for the same offense.

Thus at every step the scheme of "vicarious atonement" is repudiated by sound reason. Of the many other objections, its artificiality, its clumsiness, its patent injustice, its making God a party to a piece of unreality and make-believe, its contradictions and incompatibilities and absurdities, its treatment of religion as a method to escape punishment rather than a means to escape the sin for which the punishment comes, its putting all vitality into the moral nerves at the expense of the moral muscles, its necessitated invention of a series of consequent dogmas, all of them unnatural and mechanical like itself, there is not space here to treat. Together they constitute a complicated doctrinal machinery, even—in places—a theatrical *mise en scène*, though with no disguise to the fictitious make-ups, no pretense of anything like illusion or perspective, and the real designer of the masks the Supreme Being! Anything more irrational, more grotesque, more outlandish, more astounding, is unknown in the history of religion. And yet the two ideas beneath it are sound.

It is no doubt true that the Theology of the last 50 years has greatly changed its presentation of the doctrine, mainly by emphasizing the death of Christ as the fullest possible exhibition of love and self-sacrifice, and by abating stress on its punitive features. But so long as his death is supposed to sustain any relation to human welfare through the Divine attitude,

the loss of the propitiatory idea must be compensated by enlargement of the dramatic, so that little beyond phraseology is gained.

Is it possible to reconcile the two apparently contradictory conceptions stated? Let us start out with the belief that God is good, that evil is a contravention of the Divine order, and that the tendency of things must therefore be to a restoration of good everywhere. Every evil done must, as a cause, produce effects, punitive and disastrous, to continue until worked out or cancelled by opposite influences. But such influences are created by true repentance, partly as reversing the internal attitude, partly as starting new emotions and purposes, partly as producing a reformed life—the originator of causes opposed to evil. In time these influences, *because invigorated by the predominant power of good*, overcome and annul the inferior power of evil. Thus, though the effect of wrong, like every other effect, must be experienced, and cannot be effaced by mere Divine volition or the abrogation of Law, it may be gradually cancelled by the mightier force of that good which is the normal condition of the universe and invoked by the penitent. He has put himself on the side of right, is in harmony with all Nature, shares again in the natural health, has all the vital energies of the universe coöperating with him, and may expect an end to the suffering and harm excited by temporary identification with the abnormal. And this is *Divine Forgiveness*,—not an easy-going, good-humored "Say no more about it", or a sentimental, compassionate waiver, or a violent wrench to the Law of Causation, but a generous endorsement of and help to one who has returned to the right path and is doing all his possible to rectify the effects of error. Thus it would seem that "mercy and truth have met together," that "righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

QUESTION CLIX.

We are taught that life on this earth is the Hell or place of punishment for past sins, while Devachan is the Heaven or place or state of reward. How is it that no man would voluntarily undergo hun-

dreds of years of idle, inactive, semi-conscious illusion in Devachan, though called Heaven, while everyone clings with the utmost tenacity to the wide-awake, active, tangible life on earth, with all its vicissitudes of pleasures and pains, though it is called punishment?

Ans.—Of those to whom this teaching comes, very many do not believe it. Of those who believe it, all do not realize it. Of those who realize it, no small proportion are influenced by other considerations than the reception of reward or punishment.

The second sentence is an over-statement. There is a good deal of weariness with life, as is shown by the question "Is life worth living?" and by the frequency of suicide; and there is reason to believe that many men would gladly accept instant annihilation if it could be assured. More accurately stated the Question would be, "Why would most people prefer earth-life as it is to Devachan as it is represented?"

One reason is that men naturally cleave to that which they know. The conditions of existence here are familiar to us; we have had, indeed, no conscious experience of any other; and a radical change, especially a change which once made could not be revoked, has in it some element of terror. Another reason is that we can form no conception of disembodied existence. All consciousness here is associated with a body, and life without it seems ghostly and ghastly, phantom-like, more or less unreal, certainly incomplete. Still another is that most of us have here some close interests or loves from which we would not readily part; a fourth, that there are often unsatisfied ambitions not permanently to be foregone; a fifth, that the instinct to live, by itself and without reference to any specific purpose, is usually strong,—a healthy instinct too, and wisely given by Nature, as otherwise much sorrow or pain would end a career. And so it comes about that the utmost a belief in Devachan can as a rule accomplish—perhaps all that it ought to accomplish—is to correct our ideas as to the places for reward and punishment, to abolish fear of death, and to reconcile us to life's having an end, without at all making us eager for that end, much less inciting us to hasten it.

QUESTION CLX.

In the books and articles I read, Theosophy is sometimes spoken of as a fixed body of doctrine which one must believe or he cannot be a Theosophist. Other books say that Theosophists are free. I don't understand how I can be free if I am bound to believe certain doctrines. What are the facts?

Ans.—Theosophy, like a man, has an inner spirit and an outer form. The inner spirit is devotion to truth; the outer form is the systematized facts which that spirit has discovered in its search for truth. Now a man may be a Theosophist either in the sense that he partakes of that spirit or that he accepts that form.

The form derives its probability of accuracy, not from authority, for no being is commissioned to enjoin upon another any doctrine, but from the competency of those who have by long investigation gained the materials for it. In proportion as their number was numerous and as each was qualified by ability, industry, and precision to attain correct results, is the presumption in favor of correctness. Now many of the "doctrines" stated in Theosophical works have that presumption in high degree. They concern questions in cosmogony, geology, human history, individual evolution, etc., which have been for untold ages studied by thinkers incomparably better equipped and further advanced than we. Not only is their competency overwhelming, but, in regard to such outlines as have been disclosed, they are unanimous in their conclusions. The presumption thus created and fortified is enormous. So far, then, as it can be shown that any particular doctrine expresses the concurrent discovery of such explorers is its probability established.

Moreover, there are in any system certain integral postulates which are essential to it, constitute its coherency, and pervade its details. In Theosophy Karma and Reïncarnation are examples. Not only is Theosophy meaningless without these, but they are the key to all the varied departments of the philosophy, and they furnish explanation for all the problems which arise in its study. Nothing else meets the case; these do: hence they acquire a degree of certainty hardly short of mathematical.

If any structural elements in a system cannot logically be extracted without a collapse to the system, they may fairly be regarded as an essential part of it. If so, a man cannot be an adherent to the system while rejecting its essential parts. Yet, evidently, the essentiality of these parts is not determinable by the mere *ipse dixit* of anyone, but by their demonstrable indispensability to the system.

Turning now to another aspect of this subject, we note two facts. One is that Truth is infinite, the double consequence following that it must have an infinite number of sides, and that no one intellect or group of intellects can take in all those sides. This is simply saying that nothing short of infinity can grasp infinity. But as omniscience is needful to inerrancy, mistake is always possible outside of omniscience. The possibility may be reduced to the minutest amount, but that much remains.

The other fact is that thought for circulation among men has to be expressed in language, that being the only mode of communication. Yet it is an imperfect mode, not merely because thought must always transcend verbal form, but because every tongue is defective in some specific classes of words, because no writer is absolutely faultless in expression, and because exact translations are almost impossible. Three of these considerations have always been fatal to the orthodox dogma of the "verbal inspiration" of the Bible, a further difficulty being that a verbally inspired scripture would be useless unless there existed also an infallible interpreter to explain what it meant.

Now is there in Theosophy any fixed body of doctrine which one must believe in order to be a Theosophist? The answer would seem to be No. There are a few structural doctrines without which there could be no coherency or vitality; perhaps Evolution, Karma, and Reïncarnation would be all. Certainly others—in particular the existence of a Fountain of Life from which all life flows—are needful too, but opinions differ so much as to the exact nature and scope of these that no particular pattern can be selected as the true one. There are also very many minor tenets, some important, and all having place in a minutely-finished scheme, but no one's orthodoxy could be made to turn on *them*. Opinion varies much as to their merit and proof.

Suppose, then. that a man is accused of not being a Theosophist because he does not believe thus and so. He asks, How can that be shown? It is replied that Theosophy teaches thus and so. He asks, Where? Probably after a little hesitation he is told that the teaching is given on page —— of *The Secret Doctrine* or page —— of *The Key to Theosophy*. And this brings up the vital question of infallibility in an author and infallibility in a book. He might concede, and gladly, that the presumption of correctness was enormous, but would deny either that all possible aspects of truth had been perceived by the writers, or that those perceived were obligatory on him. And he would argue thus:

"For many hundred years the deepest reverence of one of the most important sections of humanity has encircled a book. It has been called "*The* Book" *(biblos)* as supreme. To question its verbal inspiration was to avow moral baseness and incur social odium. Its prescriptions and teachings voiced the will of Heaven. In its exposition of celestial counsels, as in its cosmogony and geology and theology and teleology, it was unerring. Doubt and questioning were alike blasphemous. Yet the "Higher Criticism" has taken hold of it and exposed its errors and its human ingredients, the verbal inspiration theory has collapsed, and we see that in the book, as in the writers and as in any man, the spiritual and the carnal, the true and the false, are commingled. It is the province of spiritual insight and literary acumen to distinguish them. So must it be with any other book. The conditions of human writing forbid inerrancy. Shall the Theosophist adopt a theory of infallibility now discarded by the educated Christian? Is he to base himself on proof-texts and verbal phrases and sacred authorities just as the experience of centuries has concluded that mode fallacious? Is he to revive the obligation to deny or ignore ambiguities and contradictions and misconceptions and mistakes as essential to reverence? Is Theosophy to perpetuate in the name of Truth a doctrine which Christianity has had to relinquish in that name?

But if not, then reverent inspection is as much a necessity in Theosophical sacred writings as in any others. Educated intelligence is called for here no less than elsewhere, honest

inquiry just as essential. Canons of criticism, tests of scholarship, demands for verbal exactitude and coherent theory, dictates of reason and the moral sense, all have here their field. Partisanship, blind following, exaggerated homage which imputes an infallibility the writers thenselves disclaim, are inadmissible. The Theosophist parts with no literary solvents worked out by students in analogous domains, but shares all the acquisitions Truth-seekers have gained and cherish. Only by their use can he compare and sift and be secure. No one book contains all of Truth; no one contains it unalloyed; no one is too sacred for discrimination; no one is a finality in the march of mind."

And who can gainsay this? Who should even wish to? Coupled with the deepest gratitude for the revelations given, the sincerest desire to grasp in full all that can be held, there can be the most thorough vindication of liberty in thought and opinion, the keenest apprehension of the duty of intelligent criticism, the strictest vigilance against slavery to names or books. And if any stimulus to this attitude was needed, it could come from that teacher most revered by Theosophists, who ever insisted that in belief as in life profession was nothing as compared with reality, and who chose for the motto of her Society not "There is no duty higher than docility", but "There is no religion higher than Truth".

The objection to anonymous communications, though grave, is not final: it becomes perilous when, barring two or three strong positions, they are mainly mere vituperation: and it is fatal when they disclose that worst of literary evils—complete failure to see a point. This is for "C. M.", though not only for him or her.—[Ed.]

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